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NNSA Removes Radioactive Sources From University Facility

WASHINGTON, DC – Radioactive materials that could be used in a dirty bomb were recently removed from at a University of Hawaii facility and have arrived safely at a secure National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) facility, the agency said today.

NNSA removed a substantial quantity of radioactive cobalt-60 from a research irradiator at the university. The removal is part of a national effort by NNSA's U.S. Radiological Threat Reduction Program to recover and secure radiological materials that could be used to make a dirty bomb.

"The removal of these radiological sources has greatly reduced the chance that radiological materials could get into the wrong hands," said NNSA Deputy Director for Nonproliferation Paul Longworth. "The University of Hawaii, its surrounding neighbors and the international community are safer today as result of this effort."

The U.S. Department of Energy in the 1960s produced cobalt-60 sources and lent 100 of those sources to the university for agricultural research. When the facility stopped conducting agricultural research, the remaining sources stored at the facility became a security and safety concern.

To reduce this threat, NNSA facility contractors and subcontractors with expertise in removing, packaging and transporting cobalt-60 completed removing the materials on March 28, 2005. The material arrived at a secure NNSA facility on April 12 and has been permanently disposed.

The program is part of the Bush administration's Global Threat Reduction Initiative (GTRI), which works to identify, secure, remove and/or facilitate the disposition of vulnerable, high-risk nuclear and other radiological materials around the world as quickly and expeditiously as possible.

GTRI has initiated radiological threat reduction efforts in 40 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa, and South and Central America. NNSA recovers high-risk radioactive sealed sources declared excess and unwanted by domestic licensees and securely stores them at NNSA sites. To date, NNSA has recovered more than 10,500 high-risk sealed sources within the United States.

Established by Congress in 2000, NNSA is a semi-autonomous agency within the U.S. Department of Energy responsible for maintaining and enhancing the safety, security, reliability and performance of the U.S. nuclear weapons stockpile without nuclear testing; working to reduce global danger from weapons of mass destruction; providing the U.S. Navy with safe and effective nuclear propulsion; and responding to nuclear and radiological emergencies in the U.S. and abroad.

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